

Remarks at NASA 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala  
by  
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In the summer of 1958, the congress wrote, and the president signed, the National Space Act, establishing the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. I remember the time clearly. Fifty years ago this week, I was high above the California desert, piloting a B-29 carrier aircraft and launching the X-1E, the latest and most advanced of the fabled X-1 research airplane series.

NASA became an operating agency on October 1, 1958. I found myself, that Wednesday morning, going to work at my same job, in my same office, and doing the same work, that I had been doing the previous day. It was a relatively easy transition. We were already riding on rockets in research aircraft. We knew how to count backwards: 3-2-1. We had merely to paint over the C in the NACA on our airplanes, trucks, and vans -- and replace it with an S. At the other principle components of the new agency, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory of the California Institute of Technology, and the Army's Redstone Arsenal in Alabama, I assume they were deciding what the minimum amount of painting would be required and what new responsibilities they would face.

In any case, I suspect, there are a number of people here tonight who remember the birth of NASA and were a part of those early days. So I ask all of those here tonight who were the founding members of NASA -- those from NACA, those from JPL, and those from Redstone, and those who came from various other places -- to join NASA in the year 1958 -- to stand (raise hands?) -- and be recognized as the OLD FOGIES that we are -- and of which we are exceedingly proud.

And here tonight, a half -century later, we look back on what has been accomplished. Our knowledge of the universe around us has increased a thousand fold - and more. We learned that homo sapiens was not forever imprisoned by the gravitational field of Earth. Performance, efficiency, reliability and safety of aircraft have improved remarkably. We've sent probes though out the solar system - and beyond. We have seen deeply into our universe and looked back toward the beginning of time.

We were a competitor in perhaps the greatest peacetime competition of all time -- the Space Race. USA vs. USSR. Like a war, it was expensive. Like a war, each side wanted intelligence on what and how the other side was doing. I will not assert that the space race was the diversion which prevented a war. Nevertheless, it was a diversion, it was intense, and it did allow both sides to take the high road -- with the objectives of science, learning, and exploration.

Eventually, it provided a mechanism for engendering cooperation between adversaries. In that sense, among others, it was an exceptional national investment for each side. I submit that one of the most important roles of government is to motivate its citizens, and particularly its young citizens, to love to learn, and to strive to participate in -- and contribute to -- societal progress. By that measure, NASA will, without doubt, rank in the top tier of government enterprises.

The goal is far more than just going faster, higher and further. Our goal, indeed our responsibility, is to develop new options for future generations. Options for expanding human knowledge, exploration, human settlement, and resource development in the universe around us.

Our highest and most important hope is that the human race will improve its intelligence, its character, and its wisdom so that it will be able to properly evaluate and choose among those options and the many others that they will encounter in the years ahead.

And I look forward to watching the progress in their development and hearing a status report when we gather again for NASA's 100th anniversary.